

AONTAS RESPONSE

LIFELONG LEARNING PLATFORM
SURVEY

EDUCATION AND TRAINING: A VIEW
FROM LEARNING PROVIDERS AND
CIVIL SOCIETY

SURVEY ON EUROPEAN EDUCATION
AND TRAINING 2020
FRAMEWORK



The Voice of
Adult Learning

ONLINE SURVEY SUBMISSION
19 MARCH 2020

AONTAS Response to the Lifelong Learning Platform Survey (European Civil Society for Education)

Education and training: a view from learning providers and civil society
(*Survey on European Education and Training 2020 framework*)

Introduction to the survey

The strategic framework for **European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)** is a tool which allows Member States to exchange best practices and learn from each other. One of its outcomes is the annual [Education and Training Monitor](#) that provides an overview of the performance of education systems in all EU Member States in achieving 6 different benchmarks.

The statistics provided in the Education & Training Monitor comprise of data collected by Eurostat, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurydice network. However, such sources focus on the attainment of specific benchmarks based on data gathered by national governments concerning the formal education system, while **non-formal and informal learning and views of education and training providers, learners and their representative associations tend not to receive adequate attention.**

The [Lifelong Learning Platform](#) aims to collect qualitative data from stakeholders in **Austria, Ireland, Portugal, Romania & Slovenia** to produce a “reality-check” on the progress towards the ET2020 targets and what the actual situation is **through the eyes of education & training stakeholders and providers including civil society.** The survey results will be used to produce a short "shadow report" on the Education & Training Monitor.

The survey focuses specifically on the topic of inclusive education and two areas covered by ET2020: **adult participation in learning** and **early leaving from education & training.**

The survey from Lifelong Learning Platform was completed through an online submission form on 19 March 2020. Below you will find the questions asked in the survey and AONTAS' responses to those questions.

Questions are bolded. Answers are coloured in green.

1. Your Organisation

AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation

2. Your email

bhendriksen@aontas.com

3. Where is your organisation based?

Ireland

4. How would you describe the type of education which your organisation is involved in?

- Formal
- Non-Formal
- Informal
- Other (please specify)

AONTAS is an advocacy organisation which works across the spectrum of adult and community education and lifelong learning including formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

5. In which sector(s) of education does your organisation work?

- Vocational education
- Adult education
- Higher education
- School education
- Youth education
- Professional education
- Sport education
- Culture education
- Other (Please Specify)

AONTAS works in advocacy regarding all fields of adult and community education in Ireland. In all cases our focus is participation in learning for the most disadvantaged people in society. We give particular attention to supporting the ongoing existence and success independently managed and non-statutory community education providers.

6. What target group(s) does your organisation work with or represent?

- Youth
- Higher education students
- Secondary school pupils
- Apprentices
- Teachers
- University lecturers
- Adults
- Employers
- Non-formal educators/trainers
- Parents
- Children under 13 years old
- Other (Please specify)

Government (public service and politicians)

7. What profile(s) best describes your organisation?

- Education or training institution
- Civil society organisation
- Regional/local authority
- Social partner (e.g. Trade Union)
- Other (please specify)

8. At what levels does your organisation work?

- Local
- Regional
- National

9. Is your organisation a member of a national network?

- No
- Yes (please specify)

AONTAS manages and organises the AONTAS Community Education Network, which is a country wide network of community education organisations.

10. Is your organisation a member of a European network?

- No
- Yes (please specify)

European Association for the Education of Adults

11. Before taking this survey were you already aware of the Paris declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (2015)?

- Yes, I knew it well
- Yes, to a certain extent
- No

12. Before taking this survey were you already aware of the Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching? (2018)?

- Yes, I knew it well
- Yes, to a certain extent
- No

13. To what extent do you agree with the following statement regarding these EU policies on inclusive education. Choose on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=Not at all; 5= a lot)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| They have helped shape my country's national policy agenda on the topic | | X | | | | |
| They are having an impact on the pedagogical approaches of educators | X | | | | | |
| They are having an impact on their target groups | | | X | | | |

Please provide any extra information that you might consider relevant...

It is our experience that national policy in Ireland exists largely regardless of what is being outlined as a priority or focus by the EU Commission. When required our experience is that the National Government in Ireland will make their existing and planned policy fit on paper into whatever is stated or directed from Brussels.

14. What are the main challenges to making education more inclusive in your country? (up to three answers)

- Lack of strategic leadership
- Training for teachers/educators
- Lack of cross-sectoral cooperation (e.g. between education institutions and civil society or social services)
- Discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin
- Lack of funding
- Lack of access for people with disabilities
- Regional socio-economic disparities (e.g. differences between urban and rural areas)
- Other(s) (please specify)

15. Do you have any examples of a good practice that is/was particularly relevant to make education more inclusive in your country? (Provide a link if applicable)

- No
- Yes (please specify)

Community education is an effective model of inclusive education. For further information, included here is the URL to a recent policy publication produced by AONTAS in advance of our 2020 annual policy day. The paper highlights the benefits of community education as a policy and education tool for engaging the hardest to reach learners in Ireland.

<https://www.aontas.com/assets/resources/Adult-Learners-Festival/AONTAS%20Policy%20Day%20Event%202020%20-%20Friday%206%20March%20-%20PreEvent%20Paper.pdf>

16. Are you aware of the ET2020 target benchmarks regarding early leaving and adult education and the progress of your county towards achieving them?

- Yes, I am aware of the benchmark for early leaving
- Yes, I am aware of the benchmark for adult education
- Yes, I am aware of both benchmarks
- No, I am not

17. The questions that follow are split into two sections dealing separately with participation in adult learning and early leaving from education and training. Based on your experience and the work of your organisation, would you like to respond to the questions on participation in adult learning?

- Yes
- No

Adult participation in learning

The European Commission set the benchmark for adult participation in learning at **15% by 2020**. This benchmark is calculated according to the share of 25 to 64 year-olds who received formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the ET2020 Monitor survey.

When this goal was set in 2010, the share of adults participating in learning in the European Union was 9.1%. In the *E&T Monitor 2019*, this number rises to 11.1% with the following country breakdown:

-  Austria 13.9%
-  Ireland 12.5%
-  Portugal 10.3%
-  Romania 0.9%
-  Slovenia 11.4%

18. Do you think that the benchmark set by the EU on adult participation in learning is reasonable?

- Yes, it is reasonable
- **No, it is not ambitious enough.**
- No, it is too ambitious.

19. Do you consider your country's current rate of adult participation in learning, as outlined in the Education & Training Monitor, to be an accurate reflection of your national reality?

- **Yes**
- No

Please, explain your answer

The main point is that the benchmark is homogenous regardless of previous education experience. For an inclusive strategy for lifelong learning to be in place it should be broken down, as per the Education and Training Monitor, to cover those who left school early. For example the lifelong learning participation rate for people who left school with less than upper secondary school is 4% in Ireland as of 2018 reporting). This would be a better reflection of the national reality. Benchmarks for each category should be developed proportionally.

20. Does your national government have a specific strategy to achieve this benchmark?

- Yes, it has existed for 5 years or more
- Yes, it has existed for less than 5 years
- No

Could you please explain in a few sentences what this strategy is (if applicable) or any particular legislation/initiative aiming to address adult participation in learning?

Ireland has two documents that speak to the countries efforts of reaching the 15% target for participation in lifelong learning by 2020. The *National Skills Strategy 2025* is the primary strategic document. In this strategy however Ireland moves the goal to 2025 for reaching the 15% target, with a target of 10% by 2020, which is has met.

A further strategy that was established by the Department of Education and Skills and speaks to the 10% 2020 and 15% 2025 target is the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*. We expect that an *Action Plan for Education* will be refreshed when a new government is formed in 2020 following the recent February 2020 elections.

21. How useful do you think European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge? Choose on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= Not useful at all; 5= Very useful)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

22. What action(s) at European level do you think could be most useful to tackle this challenge, in your opinion? (up to two answers)

It is important that learners take an active role in informing lifelong learning processes moving forward. Learner voice is the most effective means of developing a lifelong learning system that is meeting the needs of the people who access it. It moves beyond metrics and puts learner agency back into policy practices.

The AONTAS led National FET Learner Forum is the largest learner voice project in Europe. With over 1000 learners across Ireland taking part each year, the Forum offers guidance into how to effectively capture and respond to learner voice. It is designed with the diversity of the adult learning sector in mind and through its processes, the Forum is able to facilitate learner voice in a meaningful way by promoting inclusivity, implementing robust consultation processes, and providing meaningful feedback to stakeholders.

In order to be effective and meaningful, learner voice processes must be multifaceted and clearly embedded into all adult learning policies and provision. Each EU national must therefore ensure that learner voice is embedded into their research and policy work. These processes must be clearly outlined and learners must have a say in how these processes are developed and executed. These measures will help improve our overall understanding of some of the challenges that learners have faced and potential challenges they will face in the future.

23. Based on your experience and the work of your organisation, would you like to respond to the questions on early leaving from education and training?

- Yes
- No

Early leaving from education and training

The European Commission set the benchmark for early school leaving to be **no more than 10% by 2020**. This benchmark is calculated according to the share of 18 to 24 year-olds having obtained no more than a lower secondary education diploma and not receiving any formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks preceding the ET2020 Monitor survey.

In the Education & Training Monitor 2019, the EU share of early leavers was 10.6% with the following country breakdown:

-  Austria 7.3%
-  Ireland 5%
-  Portugal 11.8%
-  Romania 16.4%
-  Slovenia 4.2%

24. Do you think that the benchmark set by the EU is reasonable?

- Yes, it is reasonable
- No, it is not ambitious enough
- No, it is too ambitious.

25. Do you consider your country's current rate of early leaving, as outlined in the Education & Training Monitor, to be an accurate reflection of your national reality?

- Yes
- No

Please, explain your answer

The class and socio-economic realities of Ireland mean that the 5% rate noted in the Education & Training Monitor hides real disparities in social communities as well as town and cities across the country. For example among the Traveller population in Ireland 28% of people left school before age 13, while this drops to 1% for the general population. This is one example, but an important example of how different communities as are affected by early leaving disproportionately in a way that is not captured in a broad national statistic. This is something that must be recognised within European policy development. Just as not all EU countries are made equal, neither are their populations within their borders.

26. Does your national government have a specific strategy to achieve this benchmark?

- Yes, it has existed for 5 years or more
- Yes, it has existed for less than 5 years
- No

Could you please explain in a few sentences what this strategy is (if applicable) or any particular legislation/initiative aiming to address early leaving from education and training?

The *National Skills Strategy 2025* was referenced earlier and established a goal of reaching the 15% participation in lifelong learning by 2025. The strategy can be found at

https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf

27. How useful do you think European cooperation can be to tackle this challenge? Choose on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= Not useful at all; 5= Very useful)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

28. What action(s) at European level do you think could be most useful to tackle this challenge, in your opinion? (up to two answers)

- Encouraging cross-border exchange of innovative teaching and learning practices
- Enabling space for discussion between national policymakers on policy reforms
- Promoting European networks of organisations
- Coordinating the collection of more qualitative data
- Other (please specify)

29. Please add any additional comment you consider relevant for this survey which was not addressed by the questions above.

There needs to be a recognition at EU policy level for the role of non-formal adult education, including community education in Ireland, and a commitment to broader education provision beyond education for skills attainment that can later be used for employment.

Recognition needs to come in the form of specific funding for non-formal education. In Ireland AONTAS have been calling on the Government for several years to effectively fund the community education sector, which operate both in formal and non-formal learning spaces. We have been calling for sustainable and long-term funding of the sector as non-statutory and non-profit providers of community education in Ireland face very complicated and numerous funding streams.

As stated earlier in this survey submission lifelong learning participation for people in Ireland with less than upper second level is 4%. However we also know that they are 7 times more likely to engage in non-formal rather than formal education when they do participate. Based on this information it is clear that a current policy agenda that is focused on a skills and employment outcomes approach is not going to reach early school leavers, and will not encourage them to participate in education. However if we can reach out to early school leavers and welcome them back to education through non-formal learning then over time they will have the opportunity to learn for other more formal reasons. You can find examples of learners like this who started in non-formal learning and progress into formal learning, and information about 5 community education organisations that are AONTAS members that reach these learners in a video recently produced by AONTAS.

The video can be found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJikxdp04Vc>



**The Voice of
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AONTAS, The National Adult Learning Organisation
2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street,
Ranelagh, Dublin 6, D06 E0H1
www.aontas.com
01 406 8220

RCN 20013042
Chy. Reg. 6719
Co. Reg. 80958